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ABSTRACT

One of the working papers in the final report of the Arizona Board of Regents' Task Force on Excellence, Efficiency and Competitiveness, this study focuses on the role of temporary faculty at Arizona's three public universities, noting that the quality of overall education of students taught by temporary instructors relates importantly to the care with which the instructors are recruited, trained, and evaluated and to their level of compensation. Though no one has proved that temporary instructors teach with less effectiveness than regular faculty, conditions of employment of temporary faculty are often limiting to exploitative, affecting the quality of the educational experience for the students. On all three Arizona campuses, many factors indicate students enrolled in entry-level mathematics and English cannot be receiving the quality of instruction they should expect. Arizona's hiring practices, training and orientation, operational support, performance evaluation, and salary compensation are noted. Four recommendations are: each university should examine the conditions of employment of temporary faculty in departments marked by heavy enrollment service loads; policy guidelines should be developed ensuring that the conditions of employment are consistent with institutional goals of quality education; institutional budgeting practices should be modified to allow most temporary faculty to be hired 4 months before the start of a semester; and planning and recruiting practices should be developed to minimize the use of part-time temporary faculty. (SM)

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ROLE OF TEMPORARY FACULTY IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION AT THE THREE ARIZONA UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The expression "temporary faculty" refers to college and university instructors who are neither tenured or tenure-eligible, and whose responsibilities do not include research and public service. Temporary faculty may be full-time or part-time. Universities have come to rely on temporary faculty to teach certain kinds of courses, including many entry-level basic skills courses. The use of temporary faculty gives universities the flexibility to address unstable enrollments and shifting program demands. Data provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics reveal that temporary faculty now comprise 32% of the total teaching force in higher education, nationwide.

No one has persuasively shown that temporary instructors teach with less effectiveness than regular faculty (Gappa, 1984). Yet it is clear, nationwide, that the conditions of employment of temporary faculty are often limiting to exploitative, and this affects the quality of the educational experience that can be provided to students.

Temporary faculty are typically poorly paid and are provided with very little job security and support. They generally have second-class status but put up with it out of personal satisfaction, economic necessity, or aspirations for a regular faculty position.

The conditions of employment for temporary faculty in English and Mathematics at the three Arizona universities are in some ways as discouraging as that reported nationwide. The University of Arizona has established reasonable and equitable salary levels for temporary instructors in English and Mathematics, and has made substantial resource commitments overall. The Mathematics Department for example is a model program. Not withstanding, the back-up support for temporary instructors in the English Department at the University of Arizona appears to be the most inadequate of the departments interviewed. Three to four instructors share desks in overcrowded "bullpen" offices; and departmental secretarial support and supplies are generally not available to them.

The compensation for temporary instructors at Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University, approximately $1500 per course, is well

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below the national average of $2,691 per course (Gappa, 1984). At Northern Arizona University, temporary instructors teaching at night through Continuing Education have been paid approximately $1100 per course, which is less than the $1500 paid to temporary instructors teaching the same course during daytime hours. The combination of salary and load for some temporary faculty in the English Department at Arizona State University is professionally unacceptable: there are faculty teaching five courses per semester at $1500 per course, while at the same time teaching additional courses (two or three!) at night for community colleges.

On all three campuses, "The money is not there when it is needed:" Failure to commit resources to department heads in Mathematics and English in March or April reduces significantly the value and purchasing power of the dollars that are actually committed and received late in the cycle. Furthermore, the long wait imposes on temporary instructors a level of uncertainty and insecurity that is entirely unreasonable.

As a consequence of all these factors, it is fair to conclude that students enrolled in entry-level English and Mathematics at the Arizona universities cannot be receiving the quality of instruction they should consistently expect to receive.

BACKGROUND

Universities around the country have found that it is neither cost effective nor in the best programmatic interest of the institution to require tenured or tenure-eligible faculty alone to teach all of the courses that are offered to undergraduate students. As a consequence, universities have come to rely on temporary instructors to teach certain kinds of courses, including many entry-level basic skills courses. The use of temporary faculty gives colleges and universities the flexibility required to address unstable enrollments and shifting program demands. Colleges and universities can provide competent instruction by temporary faculty at between 50% and 80% of the direct costs of comparable instruction by regular faculty. If temporary faculty were to work at the same pay as regular faculty there would be serious budget deficits (Gappa, 1984).[1]

Data provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics reveal that temporary faculty now comprise 32% of the total teaching force in higher education, nationwide. Approximately 24% of faculty serving four-year colleges are temporary. Twenty percent of the faculty at research universities are temporary. Fifty-three percent of faculty at two-year colleges are temporary! In light of these data, "The idea that the employment of [temporary faculty] is a casual departmental affair rather than a planned institutional effort is obsolete" (Gappa, 1984).

Gappa (1984) reports that no one has persuasively shown that temporary instructors teach with less effectiveness than regular faculty. Yet it is clear, nationwide, that the conditions of employment of temporary instructors range from limiting at best to exploitative at worst, and this affects the quality of the educational experience that can be provided to students. Gappa (1984) reports that they are poorly paid and are provided with very little job security and very little support. They generally have second-class status but put up with it out of personal satisfaction, economic

necessity, and/or aspirations for a regular faculty position.

APPROACH

The premise of this study is that the quality of the overall education experience of students taught by temporary instructors relates importantly to the care with which the instructors are recruited, trained, and evaluated, and the level at which they are supported and compensated. We chose to examine the role of temporary faculty in the English and Mathematics departments at each of the three universities. The English and Mathematics departments were singled out because they employ a relatively large number of temporary instructors, and because all undergraduates are served by these departments at some time during their academic careers. We met with department heads and program coordinators in each of the six departments, and then met separately with temporary faculty members employed by each of the departments, except for English at Northern Arizona University.

HIRING PRACTICES

Even though the overall needs for temporary instructors in English and Mathematics do not vary significantly from year to year, the department heads are kept waiting for firm commitments of funding with which to hire instructors. Some funding is generally committed in late spring or early summer, but commonly it is not made available until quite literally the last minute. The earlier that funding is committed by administration, the more a given department head can succeed in hiring the best possible instructors available. For a university like Northern Arizona University, situated in a small city where the pool of available qualified temporary instructors in English and Mathematics is very limited, last-minute approval of funding can be devastating. But even for University of Arizona and Arizona State University, situated in large cities, the late and last-minute approvals of funding are damaging. It increases the workload and frustrations of department heads and associate department heads who, throughout winter, spring, and summer, continuously try to keep the interest and confidence of temporary instructors they wish to hire. And it obviously casts greater uncertainty and insecurity into the lives of individuals who have served well as temporary instructors and who are awaiting confirmation that they will be rehired. Even highly successful, showcase entry-level programs, like the Mathematics program at The University of Arizona, are unable to hire early because of the lateness of budget allocation commitments by administration. Recruitment of temporary instructors is generally derived from a local pool of qualified individuals who keep in close contact with department heads and/or program coordinators. Some are former graduate students; some are spouses of regular faculty; some are high school teachers; all are dedicated teachers who enjoy their subject and either have masters or doctoral degrees. For reasons described above, many are hired at the last minute, even during registration week or the day (or day after) classes begin. Department heads and/or program directors do the hiring, although in some cases, such as the Department of Mathematics at The University of Arizona, a faculty personnel committee reviews the applications and makes recommendations.

TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

Although graduate teaching assistants in Mathematics and English in each of the three universities are provided with significant orientation and training at the time of hiring, and are supervised during each semester of teaching, the temporary instructors are given no formal orientation or training. The level and quality of orientation, instruction, and training depend upon what is provided by the department head and/or program director in one-on-one discussion. Generally the temporary faculty member receives a syllabus, a textbook, a class roster, and a classroom assignment. There is a reluctance to provide orientation because the temporary faculty are trained professionals, and because the department heads and/or program directors recognize how little the instructors are paid and do not wish to obligate them to additional time commitments.

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

Operational support for temporary instructors is, by and large, inadequate. Temporary instructors in the English Department at The University of Arizona appear to be most inadequately supported. Departmental secretarial support is not available to them, and they pay out of their own pockets to purchase basic materials. They are given a limit of five Xerox copies per day, from which dittos can be generated. Three to four instructors share desks in overcrowded "bullpen" offices, and this is where they meet with students during office hours. Operational support for temporary instructors in the Mathematics Department at The University of Arizona is, in contrast, much more satisfactory. The instructors have their own offices (good conditions, although several blocks removed from the math building), and they receive departmental secretarial and Xerox support. At Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University, sharing of offices is the rule (two to an office), departmental secretarial support is generally available, and a modest Xerox budget is provided.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Temporary instructors are evaluated each semester through a student-evaluation instrument. The results are made available to the instructors, although no discussion of the evaluation takes place between the department head/program coordinator and the instructor. Although some of the instructors would say they benefit from the evaluations, the evaluations have no bearing on salary adjustments because compensation is so commonly based on a fixed per-course fee (by department) that has not changed for a number of years. Department heads and/or program directors review the evaluations, especially if students have complained about the instructor or the course during the semester. Temporary instructors at Arizona State University believe that the student evaluation instrument is one that simply explores for gross problems that constitute professional irresponsibility (e.g., does the instructor show up for lecture?).

SALARY COMPENSATION

Salary compensation for temporary instructors varies from university to university, and at The University of Arizona it varies from department to department. Compensation for temporary instructors at Northern Arizona University varies depending on

whether the course is taught by day or by night.

Temporary instructors in english composition at Arizona State University receive $1500/section, $1800 if they have a PhD. These instructors do not receive any benefits unless they teach five courses per semester for two semesters each year. Those that choose to teach "5 and 5" do so with the understanding that they will stand a better chance to be rehired the following year. In the Mathematics Department at Arizona State University, compensation per credit unit is the same as for English, but there is no opportunity for benefits. All temporary faculty are limited to 49% employment. At the University of Arizona, compensation for temporary instructors in english composition is $2300/section. Full-time temporary instructors in the Department of Mathematics at The University of Arizona receive $20,000/year, plus benefits. At Northern Arizona University, temporary instructors teaching at night through Continuing Education have been paid approximately $1,100 per course, which is less than the $1,500 paid to temporary instructors teaching the same course during daytime hours. This holds for both Mathematics and English.

Temporary instructor salaries at Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University are significantly below the average salary rate for temporary instructors per course at universities nationwide: $2691 (Gappa, 1984). Even the $2300/course and $2500/course salary rate for temporary instructors in English and Mathematics at The University of Arizona is below the mean. The salary rate for graduate-degree holding temporary instructors at Arizona State University is exacerbated even further in the English Department, where the course load is, in some cases, beyond reason. There are instructors teaching "5 and 5" who are also teaching up to three courses at a community college. Each ASU english composition course serves twenty-seven students who write ten papers/term. Thus, the ASU grading load alone for a temporary instructor on "5 and 5" is 1350 papers per term. Allowing 30 minutes per paper, these "human grading machines" spend (or should spend) 675 hours per term just grading papers, not counting class preparation, office hours, and lectures.

CONCLUSIONS

The conditions of employment for temporary faculty in English and Mathematics at the three Arizona universities are as discouraging as that reported nationwide. Even though Mathematics and English are described by the Board of Regents and the universities as high priorities in undergraduate education, the resources have not always followed. Operations dollars invested are generally minimal. Temporary instructors in the English Department at The University of Arizona appear to be most inadequately supported. Three to four instructors share desks in overcrowded 'bullpen' offices; departmental secretarial support and supplies are not available to them. Although the University of Arizona has established reasonable and equitable salary levels for temporary instructors in English and Mathematics, and have made substantial resource commitments overall, the salaries for temporary instructors at Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University are below reasonable level. Salary and load, especially when viewed together, are exploitative in the English Department at Arizona State University. Some temporary faculty at ASU teach five

courses per semester at $1500 per course, while at the same time teaching additional courses at night at community colleges. At Northern Arizona University, salaries for temporary instructors teaching at night are significantly less than that for temporary instructors teaching the same course during daytime hours.

On all three campuses, "the money is not there when it is needed": Failure to commit resources to department heads in March or April reduces significantly the value and purchasing power of the dollars that are actually committed and received late in the cycle. Furthermore, the long wait imposes on temporary instructors a level of uncertainty and insecurity that is entirely unreasonable. As a consequence of all these factors, it is fair to conclude that our undergraduate students cannot be receiving the quality instruction that is possible, the quality of instruction they should consistently expect to receive in the basic skills areas of English and Mathematics.

The conclusions reached by Gappa (1984) based on her national survey also apply to Arizona: "Institutions should replace freewheeling departmental autonomy with centralized responsibility and accountability for [temporary faculty] employment to ensure fair and humane treatment."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Each university should examine the conditions of employment of temporary faculty in departments marked by heavy-enrollment service loads, paying special attention to recruitment practices, training and orientation, work load, compensation, benefits, departmental support, and performance.

- Policy guidelines should be developed that ensure that the conditions of employment of temporary faculty are consistent with institutional goals of delivering quality instruction to undergraduates.

- Modify institutional budgeting practices in such ways to permit most temporary faculty and graduate teaching assistants to be hired at least four months before the start of a given semester.

- Develop planning and recruiting practices that minimize the use of part-time temporary faculty, in favor of greater use of full-time temporary faculty and graduate teaching assistants.

ENDNOTES

[1] Gappa, J. M., 1984, Part-time faculty: higher education at a crossroads: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Report #3, Association for the Study of Higher Education, Washington, D.C., 109 pages.